

# The Influence of Andean Social Movements in Enacting Democratic Reform

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After weeks of nonviolent protest in the Northern Amazon of Peru, President Alan Garcia and the indigenous group AIDESEP appeared to be in a standoff. The organization claimed that Garcia's recent decree loosening restrictions on mining, lumbering and oil exploitation in large swaths of rainforest were infringing on the property rights of indigenous Amazonians and threatening the "the lungs of the earth." On June 8, 2009, government police forces had had enough. They fired tear gas tanks and live ammunition into the crowd killing approximately 40 individuals. The demonstrators remained persistent - they quickly responded to the attacks killing nine police officers and burning several government buildings to the ground. The violent repression immediately attracted international attention casting light on Peru's indigenous organizations and the values they stood for. In this particular instance, President Garcia had recently enacted the "law of the Jungle" granting private companies virtually indiscriminate access to 70% of the Peruvian Amazon. When protesters refused to capitulate, Garcia reacted with deadly force – a costly mistake. International attention responded quickly demonizing the attacks as Garcia's public approval ratings dropped dramatically. He had no choice but to abandon his plans for privatization (Renique 330).

This story is not alone. Throughout the Andean region of Latin America, indigenous peoples have grouped together in forming powerful civic organizations with cohesive interests and articulated demands. Bound together by a history of colonial exploitation, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador all share a similar pattern in contemporary development. Since the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, governments have quickly recognized that they can no longer afford to ignore the marginalized masses. While Latin America is no stranger to government exercising violent oppression, such instances have become increasingly rare in the democratizing region. The explosion of civil society organizations has helped fuel the expansion of political parties by

influencing their platforms and holding elected officials accountable to campaign promises (Brysk 154).

This paper will examine the influence of social movements in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador to determine their effectiveness in achieving their demands and contributing to the strength of democratic institutions. Because demands are often mediated by political parties, I will also address the complex relationship between social movements and their electoral aspirations. First we will explore each country's political, social, and economic development through multiple indicators and statistical data. We will then examine the contemporary history of each Andean country and the role of social movements in shaping the path towards democracy. Due to the common Incan heritage of the Andes, special emphasis will be placed on organization among indigenous peoples and their recent political aspirations. Finally I will analyze the research and draw broad conclusions on how these social movements have influenced the democratic development of the region.

### **Political and Economic Overview**

Much of Peru's recent history has been characterized by political instability and economic troubles. It has only been in the last 20 years that Peru has obtained sustained economic growth through recent market reforms earning it the title of an "emerging economy." The privatization has spurred foreign direct investment and firmly integrated the country into the global economy. Peru's current GDP is approximately \$275 billion and growth is currently listed at 8.6%, one of the highest in Latin America despite the recent global financial meltdown. The GDP per capita (Purchasing Power Parity) is \$9,330 firmly establishing it as a middle income

country (85<sup>th</sup> in the world). While poverty has rapidly reduced over the last 6 years (in 2004, nearly half the country's population was under the poverty line), 34.8% of the people continue to struggle in poverty with 11.5% in extreme poverty (ECLAC 2010). Similar to many other Latin American nations, Peru possesses a high income inequality with a Gini index of 49.8 (compared to 40.8 in the United States). Much of this inequality is reflected in living patterns as poverty is particularly high in rural areas (CountryWatch). The United Nations Human Development Index lists Peru 63rd in the world with a 0.723 marking. This is a relatively strong score within Latin America outperformed only by the Southern Cone countries. The Human Development Index factors GNI per-capita, literacy education, and life expectancy into account.

CountryWatch's political risk index is based on numerous criteria including political stability and representation, democratic accountability, security and crime, human development and jurisprudence. With a score of 10 indicating the lowest political risk, Peru is listed at 7 while the United States was given a 9.5. Additionally Freedom House labels Peru as "free" with relatively strong marks under "political rights" (2) and slightly less under "civil liberties" (3) (CountryWatch). Typically research has shown that these institutional performances are or will become congruent with public opinion and desire for democracy. For example, in the years prior to Mexico's transition into democratic competitiveness, public opinion indicated strong support for democracy (Seligson et al. 10).

Ecuador similarly shares Peru's difficult history in obtaining democratic institutions. The small country spans the northern limits of the Incan Empire leaving it with an indigenous population of approximately 20%. Oil provides a significant source of income for the country (member of OPEC), though it remains vulnerable to fluctuations in price. However, Ecuador's greatest export is its citizens who provide roughly \$1.7 billion in remittances generally from the

United States (Kuecker 103). The current GDP per capita (Purchasing Power Parity) is \$7,776 placing it 93<sup>rd</sup> in the world (IMF 2010). GDP growth is relatively low as of 2010 expanding at 2.4%. Ecuador's Human Development Index of 0.695 places it 77<sup>th</sup> in the world offsetting its low per capita income with decent rates of education and literacy (highest among women). Like Peru, Ecuador possesses high income inequality with a Gini Index of 43.7. Wealth is largely concentrated in its main cities of Guayaquil and Quito. The country was hit hard by the global economic recession raising its poverty level to nearly 40% despite recent gains. Freedom House lists Ecuador as partly free with a 3,3 rating and the Political Risk Index has been assessed at 6 (CountryWatch).

By economic indicators, Bolivia is last among the Andean countries. Not surprisingly, Bolivia also possessed the largest indigenous presence composing approximately 60% of the population. There is significant regional differences in interest with Indians concentrated in the highlands and conservative landholders living in the Santa Cruz region. Despite the lack of national unity, the country's demographic distribution lends to a high degree of social mobilization. The United Nations places it in a lower developmental tier with an HDI of 0.643 (95<sup>th</sup> in the world). The GDP per capita (PPP) is significantly lower than Peru and Ecuador at \$4,592 (IMF 2010). The country has shown adequate signs of growth (3.4%). The amount of people living below the poverty line is estimated at 62.7% and the country's Gini Index is listed at 44.7 (CountryWatch). Little data exists to judge the performance of President Evo Morales who ran on a campaign of indigenous support with left-leaning goals of reducing poverty and income inequality. Though Freedom House lists the country as partly free (3,3) with a Political Risk Index of 5.5, recent research appears to indicate that civil liberties and political rights have expanded under the new President (Madrid et al. 4).

### **History of Social Organization:**

The ideological extremes of military rule and Marxist opposition that gripped Latin America throughout the Cold War era effectively eliminated any significant development of peaceful civil society organizations. The intellectual embrace of Marxism placed complete trust in the state and ostracized private, reform-minded social organizations. Similarly, military regimes clamped down on all forms of opposition often through terror and imprisonment. They advocated Washington Consensus policies proscribing unfettered free market capitalism with minimal state intervention (neoliberalism). While the reforms may stabilize the economy, it often marginalized the lower classes that typically composed the political left. This lasting legacy of distrust can still be witnessed through the common grievances of many civic organizations today (Baker 52). Neoliberalism can also be credited for the rapid expansion of civil society. This economic structure challenged not only the autonomy of indigenous groups but also their standard of living and employment opportunities. At the same time, however, the international institutions pushing neoliberal reforms also advocated democratic reforms in the political structure. Flexible, representative governments undermined the typical political and social base needed for revolution (Eckstein 355). With the end of the Cold War, Latin American philosophical thought began to transition from Marxism towards a more radically pluralistic democratic society. The adverse economic system combined with greater political freedoms opened the door for increased civic organization among all members of society.

The brutal tactics exercised by militaristic authorities made small, immediate civic organizations almost a necessity. "Civil Society was born out of the experience of fear... In a

situation of an enormous ideological complexity, the discovery of civil society was much less a question of theory than of necessity” (Weffort as quoted in Baker 57). The extreme nationalism exercised by the military also caused questioning among the left’s own statist ideology. The work of Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci helped articulate the new direction. Much of the core of Gramsci’s work advocated the construction of popular resistance through civic organizations distinct from the state and economy. These institutions (churches, trade unions, neighborhood groups) combined to help divert the accumulation of centralized government power in acting as a major counter-balance (Baker 58). Additionally, civil society provides an organized channel for political parties to disseminate ideas and coalesce common interests. Guerilla movements appeared vulnerable whereas widespread nonviolent organization could be much more formidable.

Unfortunately, the turn towards democracy in the 1980s did not prove to be the answer to the persistent problems of Latin America. Often known as the “Lost Decade,” the 1980s saw massive debt, economic slowdown, unemployment and inflation for many countries. Suddenly citizens grew weary of the elitist government and educated intellectuals that sold complex economic theories as the answer to the nation’s problems. The newfound freedoms fostered greater mobilization among citizens of common background. By the 1990s, an identifiable culprit emerged: neoliberal economics (Vanden 43). The traditional political systems that had welcomed these policies were leaving behind the vast majorities of their people while enriching a select few. The current mobilizations are very different from the popular uprisings of the previous era. Higher levels of literacy and greater access to education have shifted the preference from radical revolution to nonviolent mobilization. One of the most powerful determinants of civic participation and support for democracy is education (Seligson et al. 37). As governments

expanded educational opportunities, their citizens, in turn, pushed for greater institutional reforms. Additionally, mass communication technology and low cost access to the internet allows a social movement to recruit membership, organize an internal structure, and gain international visibility (Vanden 44).

### **The Creation and Function of Social Movements**

Civil society is often referred to as the aggregate of a country's civic and social organizations and institutions not affiliated with the state (though in practice, a complex relationship often emerges). These organizations are formed through an association of similar interests, behaviors, or values in an effort to raise awareness and alter public policy. Examples of civil society groups include faith-based organizations, advocacy coalitions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, social movements (indigenous), business associations, or registered charities. It is often believed that a strong civil society is a key component of a functioning democracy. The government must be responsive to these demands in establishing a cooperative relationship with civil society and the individuals represented. Civic organizations enact change through two distinctive operations – one within, and one outside the country's established political system.

Within the political system, strong civil actors may aggregate interests among broad sectors of the population in forming a political party with electoral goals. In order to achieve their primary function of winning elections, political parties must negotiate and appeal to a wide audience (Schonwalder 5). Political parties have the obvious advantage of establishing a physical presence within the policy formation process. However, representatives of civic organizations



with specific interests may prove too stubborn or idealistic to successfully negotiate the complexity of party politics. Entering the electoral realm may also require a hierarchical structure that can fracture the democratic connections upon which a social organization founded itself. Candidates may renege on campaign promises once in office further deteriorating their organized constituent base. Nonetheless, a direct representative presents the best opportunity to influencing policy.

Outside the political system, a civic organization may lobby for change through the creation of a social movement. While social movements are notoriously difficult to define, they require a degree of sustainability, geographic magnitude, and a coherent platform challenging the prevailing power structure. It is not enough to organize a short-term campaign of street protests; a social movement derives influence from continuity (Encarnacion 360). It is only from a robust civil society that powerful social movements can be generated to the point where politicians have no choice but to heed the demands. While traditional perspectives viewed social movements as the result of an inarticulate frustration, contemporary research suggests that these movements are composed of rational, socially active individuals who are well integrated into the community. Their general support from the media (in the recent democratic era) has helped legitimize their cause and amplify their voice on an international scale. Today in Latin America, social movements are an established aspect of the political system (IADB 112).

Although they take on numerous forms in different regions, street protesting appears to be the most visible and influential lobbying mechanism in Latin America. Due to Latin America's long history of elite rule, demonstrations are almost always composed of poor and working class individuals (IADB 113). Thus, effective movements help expand the inclusiveness of a country's democracy by further incorporating marginalized groups. At the same time,

however, protests are also indicative of an institutional shortage by which citizens may voice their demands. Using their strength of numbers, a protest may jam major channels of transportation (take over airports, block roadways, march through main city plazas, etc) and effectively halt local economic production. In order to contain the protests, governments may dispatch law enforcement or the military expending considerable state resources in the process. Unfortunately, the stand-off occasionally ends in violence as the national government grows impatient and authorizes the use of force to dispel the demonstrators.

While social movements exhibit several positive characteristics, they can also generate a destabilizing effect that undermines the nation's overall political health. Until very recently, Latin America was plagued by authoritarian governance and revolutionary fervor echoed among the lower classes. Social organization was often limited to radical fringe groups that advocated violent overthrow of the national government. This legacy still persists, to a lesser degree, in modern social movements. Instead of being proactive and methodically working towards a feasible agenda, social movements may often be reactive when policy opposes their interests. Social movements can quickly devolve into violent protests which paralyze the country and leave the national government in a particularly difficult situation (IADB 120). The movement may rejoice when leaders resign to pressure, but this can create a vulnerable political vacuum that allows unelected leaders to assume power. Because Andean democracy is still in a vulnerable, experimental stage, the continuous political failure only cripples the nation's faith in the overall system (IADB 121). However, with the severe representational shortcomings of a nascent democracy, perhaps forceful social movements are the only means of establishing an audible voice.

## **Peru: The Struggle for Collective Mobilization**

Compared to the other Andean countries with high Indigenous populations (Ecuador and Bolivia), the mobilization among Peruvian Amerindians is relatively low. Currently Peru's indigenous comprise roughly 45% of the total population consisting of two main ethnic groups residing primarily in the highlands – the Quechua and the Aymara. Researchers attribute this to multiple factors. First, there are enormous physical barriers in Peru that placed challenges on establishing a common identity. By the late twentieth century, nearly 10 million indigenous people had moved to urban areas concentrated on the Pacific Coast (primarily in Lima). Furthermore, research on Andean culture indicates that separate communities tend to classify one another as uniquely different. One community member will sometimes regard the member of another community as distinct in identity (Thorp 468).

Historical factors have also placed additional obstruction on mobilization. The Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) movement paralyzed much of the country especially in rural areas of Amerindian concentration. The paranoia left over from this era caused the Fujimori regime to quash opposing political organization by demonizing them as enemies of the state. The rhetoric effectively constrained collective action among the indigenous (Van Cott 226). Also, during the pinnacle of the Shining Path's reign of terror, many other Latin American countries were receiving a large number of foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These NGOs were focused on increasing the political visibility of indigenous groups and providing the resources to foster their growth and development. The obvious danger in Peru prevented many NGOs from establishing offices in the country. Thus, the indigenous Peruvians were never subjected to this informal education that gave Ecuador and Bolivia a head start (Van Cott 229).

We begin our contemporary history with the 1990 election which saw the rise of a new curious leader born of Japanese descent. Alberto Fujimori decided to abandon political parties altogether calling himself a “man of the people.” The campaign strategy worked well, and Fujimori introduced a new restructuring program aimed at attracting foreign investment (Burt et al. 260). Fujimori’s lack of experience and overall knowledge regarding politics made him especially more attracted by authoritarianism. His initial success in counteracting hyperinflation and bringing the Shining Path movement under control earned him the necessary political capital to perform the autogolpe (auto-coup). This massive shut-down of Congress effectively buried established political parties making it Fujimori versus “the opposition” – a leaderless and largely unorganized group. In the constituent assembly elections held in late 1992, 85% of the vote went to Fujimori supporters or independent candidates. Throughout the decade, political parties remained a fleeting phenomenon built only around election time and quickly dissolved afterward (Levitsky 10).

Meanwhile, civilian institutions lost considerable power and political parties found little support as allegations of corruption became more apparent. Throughout the 1980s, the hyperinflation and political violence inflicted by Sendero Luminoso mitigated the salience of nonviolent social movements (typically arising from the poor and working class). The gradual decline and ultimate failure of IU, the party of the left, gave social movements no political apparatus to sound their voice. The situation only deteriorated further under Fujimori who strongly denounced collective action (calling those who spoke out a “terrorist”) and undermined social movements in many ways. For example, Fujimori sought to magnify the direct relationship between the national government and the personal individual by directly handing out government aid and foodstuffs to the poor masses and bypassing grassroots organizations that

originally formed to serve exactly this purpose (Burt et al. 264). Additionally, Fujimori created new government agencies that began a subtle process of cooptation of the preexisting local civic organizations. The President completely turned his back on established social movements rendering them almost nonexistent throughout his first and second term (Crabtree 376). Thus, Fujimori was able to construct an authoritarian system with virtually no governmental checks and balances to mitigate his power. Many citizens were in favor of his repressive style as a means of controlling the chaos caused by previous regimes. Despite the clear weakening of democratic institutions, public approval for the President skyrocketed from 53 to 81 percent in 1992.

By the late 1990s Fujimori's incompetence became undeniable and economic conditions disfavored the once-empowered working classes. His unconstitutional reelection in 2000 initiated a mass reawakening of civil society. Many women and student organizations protested regularly outside the Presidential Palace in Lima. On July 28, Fujimori dispatched the armed forces with destructive results killing 6 individuals and wounding hundreds more. The tragedy worked to further delegitimize the presidency while showcasing the influence of demonstrations organized through civil society (Burt 3). After a bribery scandal went public, Fujimori was forced to resign and fled the country ushering in the leadership of Alejandro Toledo. By this time, however, Peru's democracy lay in shambles and citizens were extremely frustrated by the country's complete reverse in development. "The Fujimori regime bequeathed to the next administration a populace even more cynical toward government, having stripped away the institutions necessary for effective and representative democratic governance" (Arredondo 75).

As a mestizo, Toledo's capture of the presidency represented a huge victory for indigenous peoples of Peru. Rather than continue Fujimori's autocratic style, Toledo rendered

himself powerless under constant capitulation. This time, it would be social protests that would overwhelm the government into ineffectiveness. As soon as Alejandro Toledo began departing from his campaign promises, workers in public transport immediately staged a series of strikes in the southern city of Arequipa. The *Arequipazo*, as it came to be called, became a national symbol for the renewed power of collective action and quickly spread to surrounding areas (Arredondo 78). Eventually indigenous Amazonians would organize a stout resistance to a government plan that would open large swaths of rainforest land to privatized logging. The protesters blocked all forms of local transportation forcing Toledo to call a state of emergency in May 2003 and temporarily suspend many civil liberties. With the lack of institutional channels to voice their demands, the protests only grew in intensity as teachers, farmers, health care workers, judiciary workers, and union members (Arredondo 81) all joined in the demonstrations.

Each of the frustrated groups seemed to be expressing a similar sentiment: the free-market reforms of previous years had not solved their problems. The macroeconomic growth of the previous decade had not been shared equally and citizens were finally responding. Civil groups expressed deep disenchantment with their government's continuous failures and corruption scandals. The 2006 elections reflected this frustration with the reelection of Alan Garcia as "the lesser of two evils" (Thorpe 326). Currently approval ratings for Alan Garcia are abysmally low. According to Peru's Institute of Public Opinion, about 27% of Peruvian citizens feel that Garcia is doing an adequate job with 67% strongly disapproving (Institute of Public Opinion 5). The fierce discontent with the Peruvian Government stands in stark contrast to many other Latin American countries where new left-leaning Presidents have enjoyed moderate to high approval ratings.

While political parties, especially APRA, have recently rebounded, their support remains diminished. Without a strong party system, voters must often confront a confusing array of candidates with no identifiable labels or categorizations. Because political parties exist beyond each election, they can develop long-term structural goals as opposed to a politician's focus on short-term approval to gain reelection. While Peru has not experienced a complete breakdown, the ineffectiveness of political parties has hindered the creation of strong grassroots organizations and decreased civic engagement (Arredondo 83). This is one of the major reasons why individuals like Alan Garcia are able to obtain power after miserably failing in his first term. Peruvian social movements missed a golden opportunity to elect a member of their ranks to power following the resignation of Alejandro Toledo. Popular protest had brought about his demise, but failed to capitalize on the opportunistic environment that lacked strong political parties.

The 2011 general election appears to be promising thus far. Because no candidate received more than half of the votes in the general election, a run-off election is currently scheduled for June 5<sup>th</sup>. The current front-runner, Ollanta Humala, is the son of an indigenous lawyer who was a member of the Communist Party of Peru. Humala led a similar life joining the military and at one point leading a revolt against the Fujimori regime in 2000. His party, Gana Peru, is a coalition of several left-leaning political parties representing the indigenous poor and working classes. Humala has gained considerable support from the other left-leaning presidents of South America including Evo Morales (Portocarrero 12). Surprisingly his opponent, Keiko Fujimori, is the daughter of former President Alberto Fujimori who is currently imprisoned. They represent the bitter regional economic debate with Lima and the Pacific coast favoring

Fujimori's free-market principles and the people of the Andean highlands calling for Humala's socialist nationalization (Carroll).

The subtle reemergence of political parties has helped social movements regain their confidence by offering a more direct channel to the national government. Though organization on the scale of other Latin American countries (Bolivia and Ecuador) remains elusive, the number of civic groups in Peruvian society has undoubtedly increased. Recent research indicates that foreign direct investment is the number one cause of demonstration, number two being local government corruption (Arce 42). Unfortunately, many of these groups tend to act in isolation and often only produce localized effects that never reach national prominence (Schonwalder 10). One particularly powerful organization, AIDASEP, has united six indigenous groups from around the country under a singular mobilization. Although the massacre in June 2009 was very debilitating, the organization was ultimately successful in repealing the "law of the Jungle" giving private corporations free access to exploit the land's natural resources. For many Peruvians, AIDASEP has inspired a new age of civic involvement and how powerful individuals can be when they unite on common ground.

### **Bolivia: Capitalizing on the Wave of Popular Sentiment**

With the largest percentage of indigenous peoples in Latin America, Bolivia is one of the most important examples of the power of collective action through strong civic organizations. The country is highly regionalized with Indians concentrated in the Andean highlands and wealthy landowners residing in the east. As expected, Bolivia possesses extremely high levels of



income inequality and the largest percentage of impoverished peoples in Latin America. These socioeconomic conditions create a ripe environment for robust civil society marked by regular, widespread protest. In recent years, indigenous citizens finally achieved a significant political gain after years of persistent marginalization. The first indigenous president of Latin America, Evo Morales, was elected to power in 2006 and continues to enjoy widespread approval especially among his indigenous constituency. To understand Bolivia's democratic evolution, we must first examine its history in determining the roots of social organization and resistance.

Bolivia's economy has historically evolved around a very limited set of industries leaving them particularly vulnerable to global demand. In colonial times, Bolivia's immense silver deposits were completely ransacked by the Spanish empire while devastating the country's local labor supply. Similarly, Bolivia's tin industry grew to prominence after independence but was also mostly exported to the gain of wealthier nations. In recent years, this same extraction of natural wealth was justified by the guise of neoliberalism that pervaded the global conscious throughout the 1980s and 1990s. During this time, many Latin American countries became saddled with intractably high debts due to rising oil prices and development loans from the World Bank and IMF. The international financial community responded by encouraging the government to scale back its involvement in the economy and reducing its expenditures on subsidies and welfare. Many large industries (including those based on raw material extraction) were privatized and greater foreign investment was encouraged. Though these policies did help to curb inflation and reign in foreign capital, most scholars agree that neo-liberalism "has generated pervasive market failures, new forms of social polarization, and a dramatic intensification of uneven development at all spatial scales" (Larson et al. 10).

Since the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Bolivia's active network of left-leaning civic organizations has powerfully exercised its political muscle. The recent social movements were initially focused on the economic concerns associated with neoliberalism, but quickly targeted the political system as an area where systemic change could occur. Throughout the early 2000s, diverse sectors of the population were repeatedly mobilized to protest the privatization of two fundamental natural resources – natural gas and water. The political party *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement Toward Socialism or MAS) capitalized on the prevailing national conscious and assimilated the different social movements under a common platform and candidate. The successful resistance created an atmosphere ripe for the unprecedented ascendancy of indigenous leader Evo Morales.

For Bolivia's relatively fragile economy, the discovery of large gas reserves in the late 1990s suddenly made the country a key regional economic player. Demand for natural gas in the neighboring countries of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay had been continuously growing. The privatization of this industry reduced royalty fees from 50% to 18%, a giveaway that could cost the government millions in revenues. In September 2003, massive revolts took place led by the Aymara indigenous peasantry concentrated in the altiplano and Lake Titicaca regions. The government responded with brute force, upsetting thousands more. As middle class residents of La Paz staged hunger strikes, President Sanchez de Lozada was forced to flee the country amidst 500,000 marching the streets effectively paralyzing the country.

While Vice President Carlos Mesa initially aligned himself with the resistance, he abruptly moved towards the right when wealthy citizens of the Santa Cruz region lashed out. Once again, widespread protests broke out in the capital city forcing Carlos Mesa out of power and the subsequent signing of the hydrocarbons law which returned legal ownership of gas

reserves to the state. In practice the law did not nationalize gas but rather increased the price that foreign countries must pay for Bolivian gas. While the policy has significantly increased state revenues, it is indicative of a more underlying problem. The signing of new progressive laws may be widely celebrated, but they are rarely implemented as promised or faithfully executed.

In September 1999, Bolivia leased off the city of Cochabamba's (pop. 600,000) water supply to the California engineering giant, Bechtel. Within weeks, Cochabambans were slapped with rate increases up to 200% (Schultz, 2003). Even the very poorest in the region, which Bechtel claimed would only face 10% increases, experienced hikes of 60% for the most basic rate. Immediately, residents fought back with a city wide strike and shut down Cochabamba for three days until the government agreed to review the water bills. The government then retracted its comments and sent 1200 heavily armed guards to the protesters in the city square unleashing bullets and teargas onto their citizens wounding 75 people and killing one. Despite the violence, residents continued to protest as National TV broadcasted the injustice leading to an international outcry. Bechtel's officials soon fled the country and a new publicly owned company was installed to manage the water supply (Shultz 32).

While the fight to maintain water as a public commodity was successful, it was largely organized around regional borders with specified interests. The natural gas issues touched on every demographic within the country and emerged as a resource of structural significance to Bolivia's political economy. The resistance against privatizing natural gas presented an opportunity to combine diverse interests and lay the foundations for a broader movement that may extend across borders. A for-profit water industry had little chance of survival as it is commonly viewed as a human right with a large international coalition. Natural gas possesses no comparable network, yet still remains a critical natural resource with far-reaching consequences.

“Such self-organization of the popular classes to hit capital where it seriously hurts serves as an example for social movements struggling for economic and social justice throughout the Third World” (Spronk & Webber 40).

Unlike Ecuador or Peru, Bolivia’s extremely organized society can unite quickly and effectively given the right circumstances. While a variant of the *Movimiento al Socialismo* party had been in existence since the early 1990s, the events of the early 2000s helped them become a nationally recognized political force. In addition to the water and gas wars, the Aymara Uprisings and coca grower’s struggle in Chepare (Morales led this movement) demanded increased attention for the large indigenous-peasant social class. Each of these movements, while different in nature, encountered a common enemy – neoliberal economic policies. Thus, MAS was able to capitalize on the new wave of popular sentiment sweeping the country in electing Evo Morales to President in 2005.

MAS initially began with a dual purpose of maintaining its confrontational approach as a social movement while also advancing candidates in the political sphere. Though similar to the Pachakutik-CONAIE partnership in Ecuador, MAS is one distinct organization that co-opted numerous social movements during election time. MAS leadership had long been skeptical of reshaping the organization into that of a political party. However, the rise and popularity of Evo Morales has catapulted this social movement into the nation’s most powerful governing party. Since MAS took power, the populace has developed a deeper satisfaction with democracy. This is a significant gain in public sentiment as Andean countries have historically expressed serious concerns with democratic institutions. The change in attitudes is obviously attributed to Morales and the large indigenous population finally seeing the fruits of their labor.

Morales' administration has kept their promise in being responsive to indigenous and working class demands (Madrid et al. 4). Surprisingly, however, the administration's economic policy has taken on a very moderate approach despite the polarizing rhetoric. Morales appears to understand that the implementation of radical socialist policies may risk the country's economic competitiveness and hinder capital investment from abroad. Nonetheless, the administration has stood by its campaign of reversing the decades of extreme market fundamentalism that has ravaged the nation's inequities (Larson et al. 9). The overall success of the regime is quite impressive given Bolivia's volatile political climate and weak democratic legacy.

As MAS becomes increasingly institutionalized, the organization has begun moving away from its bottom-up grassroots mobilization into a more hierarchical, top-down structure. The sustainability of this subtle transformation may prove to be problematic in the future. The MAS still claims that it is a government by social movements, yet power has become increasingly centralized in the hands of Evo Morales and his group of relatively inexperienced associates (Mayorga et al 7). While the indigenous are a clear majority within the population, MAS often acts as though they are a hegemony. As a social movement, the confrontational approach and sometimes inflammatory rhetoric employed by MAS threatens to alienate other parties and harm the institutional-building necessary for a democracy. Not surprisingly, a significant resistance movement has developed in the Santa Cruz region of Eastern Bolivia where the more right-leaning groups of the population reside (Mayorga et. al 8). Ultimately, however, the legitimacy of Morales' government will rest on whether he can deliver the much needed services and employment opportunities to the huge indigenous underclass that remains stagnantly impoverished (Larson 10).

While MAS faces significant challenges in establishing the permanent foundations of democracy, popular mobilization will continue to contribute to Bolivia's political development. Their ability to organize and form coalitions points to a strongly embedded civil society. For example, the federation that called for the blockading of roads, the Union of Bolivian Rural Workers, was quickly joined by the Coca Growers Federation. Similarly, the Cochabamba Coordinating Committee to Defend Water and Life also provided resources as each organization came together in forming a highly visible, grassroots campaign. Together, they understand their position within a broader transnational movement and strategically broadcast their interests through international communication mediums. Their struggle has attracted a major growth of non-governmental organizations which only provided more wind to the sails of national resistance. Critical to their success, these civic organizations were able to maintain strong democratic ties to their constituents making them formidable voting blocs during election time. Bolivia proved to be one of the rare countries of Latin America where social movements became an instrumental aspect in enacting real, tangible change.

### **Ecuador: The Struggle for Cohesiveness between Social Movement and Political Party**

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Ecuador's democratic institutions were largely nonexistent. The country was continuously passed over to a variety of military regimes that kept citizens (especially poor and working class) alienated from political discourse. However Ecuador's discovery of oil during this period led to great economic expansion with per capita income increasing nearly 500% from 1972 to 1979 allowing the national government greater operational power. The oil wealth helped transform the capital city of Quito into an area of major

economic endeavor. However, the new wealth also exacerbated the growing regional inequality and the image of the poor *campesino*. With the reemergence of democratic rule came economic downturn resultant end to the country's petroleum boom. With GDP falling and inflation rising to 52% (highest in Ecuadorean history), the president was coerced into enacting a number of financial reforms at the behest of the International Monetary Fund. Not surprisingly, the neoliberal policies were met with wide opposition from ordinary citizens. Growing inequality made conditions ripe for new forms of civic involvement and activism. In 1986, one of the most powerful indigenous organizations of Latin America came into existence.

The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, or CONAIE, combined several regional indigenous organizations under one efficiently run umbrella. Initially, CONAIE's most forceful demand was to rewrite the first article of the national constitution to recognize Ecuador's diverse peoples in forming a pluri-national state. Their motivations also stemmed out of an opposition to mainstream political parties that they felt were ignoring indigenous sentiment. Electoral politics, they believed, could be corrupting and damaging to their organizational unity. Since its inception, CONAIE has fostered a very grassroots type of structure, acting as a communicator between the different base organizations spread throughout the country. This decentralized system allows local communities to maintain autonomy while allowing for rapid mobilization that displays a vast, formidable presence. Locally elected officials must take into account their individual CONAIE chapter which helps maintain consistent, systematic pressure (Dangl 1).

Beginning in the early 1990s, CONAIE organized a series of *levantamientos*, or "uprisings" across the country catapulting the once marginalized class into national spotlight. CONAIE represented a new method of fighting the neoliberal policies that swept Latin America

during the 1980s. The protests took the national government by surprise in casting a harsh light on the inherent problems associated with the recent economic approach. While the confederation remained largely representative of indigenous cultures, CONAIE demonstrated its pragmatism by aligning with other popular movements when strategically wise. Suddenly, the poor and working class became a voice that commanded political reckoning within Ecuador's national consciousness (Becker 166).

Although CONAIE had initially forbade its leaders from holding political office (even as far as boycotting the Presidential elections of 1992), they quickly reversed that policy in 1995 through the creation of the Pachakutik Movement for Plurinational Unity. Many local indigenous activists had become increasingly vocal about utilizing all tools at their disposal in challenging the status quo. Pachakutik formed in a participatory fashion through a horizontal, democratic structure that separated it from the traditionally defined political party. True to their CONAIE origins, they “embraced principles of community, solidarity, unity, tolerance, and respect” (Becker 168) becoming leaders of the Latin America's New Left. It has been previously assumed that political movements formed around ethnic identities could not be successful due to their exclusionary nature and inability to meet a diverse range of interests. This is not the case in the Andes where the fluidity of ethnic boundaries allows such parties to be successful (Madrid et al. 6).

The elections of 1996 brought moderate success for Pachakutik with eight deputies elected to congress, two indigenous mayors, and the first indigenous victory at the national level by longtime CONAIE leader, Luis Macas. Their presidential candidate placed a close third in the first electoral round, yet forced the remaining parties to compete for the indigenous vote helping to bring attention to their cause. Subsequent elections only brought continued success for the



young party including the 1998 passage of Ecuador's most progressive constitution to date. In the early 2000s, the burgeoning indigenous movement encountered its first internal rift as its elected leaders were unable to navigate the political arena successfully in enacting leftist reforms (Becker 168). Established political parties had learned to manipulate electoral politics in their favor through clientalistic networks, which CONAIE had difficulty overcoming. Though the elected President Gutierrez spouted leftist rhetoric during his campaign, he immediately abandoned these promises once in office. He actively worked to disband collective indigenous interests resulting in major divisions within the once powerful CONAIE organization. Many members expressed a desire to return to their roots as a social movement focused on widespread street protests. Yet in order to enact tangible policy at the national level, they would have to remain involved in the potentially divisive realm of electoral politics.

The initial support of Gutierrez had severely weakened CONAIE's mobilization efforts throughout his presidency. The relationship between CONAIE and its political arm, Pachakutik began to fracture and the fundamental indigenous base felt alienated. The party lost several seats in local and national governments. In late 2004, CONAIE elected longtime leader Luis Macas as president. Macas made the critical decision to return the organization to its social movement origins spurring a series of grassroots efforts to resist free-trade agreements and private contracts granted to multinational corporations (Becker 172). Despite these indigenous led protests, it was the mestizo middle class that finally toppled the Gutierrez regime after widespread revolt erupted in Quito in April, 2005. CONAIE's divisional issues persisted into the 2006 elections as its presidential candidate, Macas, could only garner a dismal 2% of the vote. A reporter of the *Guardian* noted, "When it comes to the vote, it appears that most of the indigenous population

does not trust one of their own. They clearly prefer to vote for a white man who, they probably believe, may well be able to deliver the jobs and housing they crave” (Gott 1).

While tangible representation proved elusive, CONAIE and its constituents were still able to elect a left-leaning president, Rafael Correa. His opponent, a banana magnate and Ecuador’s richest man, possessed strong connections to oligarchic interests and neoliberal economic policies. CONAIE perceived the threat and successfully conveyed it to the masses in launching Correa to power. The relationship between the President and indigenous constituents has been somewhat strained in light of his left-leaning ideology. Movements were initially hesitant to act out against unfavorable policies so as not to strengthen the political right. After repeated failures, CONAIE finally severed ties with the president claiming, “Correa has assumed the traditional neoliberal posture of the rightist oligarchy” (Denvir). The 2009 election brought greater woes for CONAIE capturing only 1.36% of the vote or four seats in Congress (CountryWatch). While the President seemed to be enjoying general support, a recent coup attempt in October of 2010 threatened the country’s political stability. The coup was initiated by police following the passage of austerity measures that would reduce their pay (despite significant raises in police wages over the course of Correa’s presidency). While Correa was restored to power, the event shocked the populace and exemplified the lingering vulnerability of a democratically elected president.

The transition from a grassroots social movement to an electoral apparatus presented several complications. Rather than operating freely as a private organization within civil society, a political party is tasked with navigating the often corrupt, clientalistic environment of electoral politics. Pachakutik quickly realized how difficult it was to transfer specific interests into national policy with little or no knowledge of national politics. Political savvy requires extensive

experience and flexibility. While CONAIE found success in disrupting the national government's implementation of certain neoliberal policies, Pachakutik was unable to foster more fundamental change working within the system.

## **Analysis**

While each social movement demonstrated considerable strength, the demands they requested face a very innate problem in the social structure of each country. One of the major underlying problems of the government's persistent failure devolves from the natural labor composition of the region. In Peru and Bolivia, more than 50% of the Gross National Product is derived from the informal sector of the economy (Schneider 11). Essentially this refers to the parts of the economy that aren't taxed or monitored by the government. The large labor population working in this sector severely reduces the tax base of the nation and weakens the funding for necessary public services. For example, during the Toledo Presidency "some 70% of output falls within the grey or "informal" economy, and thus escapes tax. Tax-collections, at below 12.1% of GDP, are stagnant, with most coming from a handful of large, formal companies. Evasion is widespread, particularly among better-paid independent professionals" ("The Americas: Running Out of Options; Peru"). Thus, the government simply had no means of supplying the wages promised to civil servants. The problem is endemic throughout the Andean region and is a major reason why social movements demanding greater social welfare have not found success. Governments are locked into circumstances where they simply lack the resources to provide for their people.

Social movements, especially in Bolivia, have exercised considerable power in shifting political debate. Their actions can foster a chaotic environment where political leaders are forced to step down. Yet, more often than not, the incoming leader emerges from the status quo but disguises himself behind new, lofty rhetoric. Bolivia is one of the few countries in Latin America that broke this historic trend by electing an actual representative of the masses. Although Bolivia's natural demographic (indigenous majority) is an inherent advantage for ethnic organizing, these social movements assumed an agenda-setting role as opposed to simply vetoing policy as it came (IADB 117). The movements remained persistent through small victories working proactively towards systemic reform. However, there is indication that these groups have gone dormant with their new indigenous leader in power while right-wing groups in the Santa Cruz region have escalated resistance.

One continuous theme we have noticed in each country (especially Ecuador) is the apparent difficulty of transforming a social movement into a political party. The movement often loses its participatory democratic structure and centralizes power through a rigid hierarchy. When constituents notice the change, the movement's cohesiveness begins to collapse, effectively fracturing the indigenous-peasant voice. In the case of CONAIE, the Pachakutik political party began to alienate its base when candidates ignored campaign promises and fell into corruption scandals. However, an organized political party is the only true method of gaining access to policymaking. Without representation in the official system, social movements are confined to interruptive demonstrations that can easily be ignored by politicians.

The lack of collective interest aggregation among Peru's lower working classes has allowed status quo individuals to continually obtain power. There is reason to believe that if Peru had the level of civic organization as seen in Bolivia and Ecuador, political circumstances would

be far different today. The conditions that precipitated the rise of Evo Morales were mirrored in Peru following the decline of Alejandro Toledo. However, Peru lacked a centralized organization like CONAIE (Pachakutik) or Movimiento al Socialismo. While demonstrations took place, strong, persistent social movements never materialized. Thus, protests were largely reactionary and lacked a visible organization to express the sentiments of the people (Arce 40). When matters were settled, the protests disappeared and business could resume as usual without pressure for government accountability. The indigenous group, AIDSEP, had not yet established the strong constituency connections that are necessary for mass mobilization. Thus, Alan Garcia emerged as the “lesser of two evils.” However, this trend seems to be reversing in the latest election as leftist political parties have united together in support of indigenous leader Ollanta Humala.

Though Peru has not fostered the robust civic environments found in other Andean countries, they possess a higher human development index ranking 63rd overall compared to Ecuador (77th) and Bolivia (95th) (ECLAC 2010). While it may not be an accurate measure of overall citizen happiness, the report places significant weight on economic indicators – Peru’s area of greatest success. Similarly, measurements of Peru’s political institutions (Freedom House, Political Risk Index) also indicate greater success. Peru’s booming tourism industry may partially account for some of this success gaining international exposure and forcing the government to assume the democratic characteristics of its Western customers.

What is perhaps most disheartening about Peru’s current condition is the low, continuously declining public support for democracy. On a scale of 0 to 100, Peru possesses a 60.1 (down from 65.5 two years ago) - the lowest support for democracy in the region (Carrion et al. xxvi). Both Peru’s citizenry and elected representatives appear to be in agreement as less

than 50% from both groups indicated their satisfaction with democracy (Corral 4). The report found that the variable with the highest impact on democratic support was perceptions of government success or failure in combatting poverty and unemployment. The country is currently in a critical period that demands greater civic participation in order to cultivate the seeds of democracy. Bolivia and Ecuador are already moving in the right path with support for democracy steadily rising at 70.3 and 68.4, respectively. These positive attitudes are largely attributed to the high levels of social organization found in both countries (Seligson et al. 37). As previously discussed, it is suggested that this general will eventually help Bolivia and Ecuador catch up to Peru in terms of political stability and civic freedoms.

## **Conclusion**

While the three Andean countries share a common cultural identity, they do not share a uniform development pattern. Each nation is a product of its unique history, geographical landscape, and human population. Nonetheless, the nations of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia appear to be moving in a positive direction toward obtaining strong democratic institutions and a better standard of living for all its citizens. Revolutionary guerilla groups have been replaced by nonviolent civic organizations that stress economic empowerment and participatory governance. While the future appears bright for each nation, several obstacles still lay in their path. As one of the most organic of human institutions, social movements possess a unique opportunity to spearhead the deepening of democracy

The results of my research, however, remain largely mixed. In some cases, social movements have rearranged the entire political order of a country and given newfound

representation to the traditionally marginalized classes. In other cases, independent social movements failed to collectivize and could not make significant gains in advancing favorable. Nonetheless every country appears to be moving in the direction of increasing organization and political representation that take the indigenous poor into account. Undoubtedly social movements have, thus far, played a critical role in the national conscious of each Andean country. While the electoral gains were sometimes insignificant, the presence they established on the streets had the power to paralyze economic activity and earn the respect of national governments.

Today's social movements have taken advantage of the available technology in promoting their cause internationally. For example, one movement, La Via Campesina (literally "the peasant way), is now visible on five different continents and currently represents over 150 million people globally. Initially organizing around a platform of sustainable agriculture and "food sovereignty," they have become one of the leading voices in the proliferating anti-globalization movement. They were also major players in helping to topple unresponsive governments as seen in Ecuador in 2000 and Bolivia in 2003. The increased visibility has placed tremendous pressure on national governments to either reform or risk global humiliation. The organization maintains tight, formal coordination and has surprisingly maintained its autonomy and pluralistic roots. La Via Campesina become an international symbol of economic justice (Torres et al. 308).

As the Andean nations continue in their path towards democracy, the responsibility of civil society is ever heightened. Even in the midst of significant gains, now is the time to push harder. Now is the time for increased mobilization, for greater international advocacy. The prevailing trend indicates these people can no longer be ignored. Together the indigenous

underclass of the Andes has become a powerful regional force. As renowned scholarly Sidney Tarrow notes, “Transnational activism does not resemble a swelling tide of history but is more like a series of waves that lap onto an international beach, retreating repeatedly into domestic seas but leaving incremental changes on shore” (58).



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